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ABSTRACT

Part of the Montana Council for Indian Education's Indian Culture Series, the book contains six folk stories recorded on reservations and by headstart teachers. The stories are: "The Owl", a Gros Ventre tale; "How the Robin Got a Red Breast", from the Flathead Tribe; "Old Man Coyote and the Wild Geese", a Crow Indian folk story; "How the Animals and Birds Got Their Names", from the Nez Perce; "After Dark", a Shoshone story; and "Napii and the Bullberries", a folk story from the Blackfeet. The book has numerous black and white illustrations. It has an "easy" reading level and a "medium difficult" interest level. (SB)

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MONTANA
NORTHERN ROCKIES
OLD COYOTE – TOINEETA

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INDIAN TALES of the NORTHERN ROCKIES

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Collected by

Sally Old Coyote

and

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BB – 10

ONE DOLLAR

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Folk Stories and Legends

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BB TALES FROM THE BITTERROOT VALLEY (Salish) Kathryn Law.

BB THE TURTLE WENT TO WAR (Cheyenne) Henry Tall Bull and Tom Weist.

BB INDIAN TALES OF THE NORTHERN ROCKIES (Flathead, Nez Perce, Gros Ventre, Shoshone, Crow) Sally Old Coyote and Joy Yellowtail Toineeta.

BB HOW THE DOGS SAVED THE CHEYENNES (Cheyenne) Gilliland.

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EE VOSTAAS (All Montana Tribes) Maxine Ruppel.

DG CHEYENNE WARRIORS (Cheyenne) Tall Bull and Weist.

EF CHIEF PLENTY COUPS (Crow) Hatheway.

DH CHEYENNE BATTLES (Cheyenne) Tall Bull and Weist.

DH CHEYENNE SCOUTS (Cheyenne) Tall Bull and Weist.

First letter indicates reading difficulty. A = easiest H = hardest

INDIAN TALES

of the

NORTHERN ROCKIES

Collected by

Sally Old Coyote

and

Joy Yellowtail Toineeta

Illustrated by
Audrey Rae Toineeta

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THE OWL

A Gros Ventre Tale

Recorded by Ft. Belknap Headstart Teachers

One time, two young Gros Ventre girls were captured by an enemy tribe. For many months they were captives and unable to escape.

One day, the tribe was busy planning a big celebration. The girls were able to escape. They ran away into the woods.

So that the enemy warriors could not find them, the girls were only able to travel by night. The wind howled through the trees. Their hearts trembled with fear at every sound.

The first night, they were having a hard time finding their way. All of a sudden, a large owl appeared. The owl circled around the girls until they understood that the owl wanted them to follow him. So for many nights the owl led the two girls across country. They were so tired.

After many nights of crossing deep coulees and hills, they came to some high hills. There the girls could watch the enemy warriors searching for them.

Finally, the warriors gave up and went back to their village. As soon as the girls were sure the warriors had given up, they came down from the hills and happily returned to their families.

(This story was told by a Gros Ventre grandmother and mother to a young girl who was frightened by an owl.)

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HOW THE ROBIN GOT A RED BREAST

A Flathead Tale

Recorded by

Angeline McClure Hendrickson

One time, a little boy was sent by his mother to the river nearby the Indian village to get some water. The first day, he brought the water back.

The next day, his mother sent him for water again. He went to the river. There were some other children playing nearby. He joined the game and forgot all about the water. He played and played.

At last he got the water and returned home. But he had been gone too long. His mother had died of thirst.

Now Old Coyote came along. His heart was sad, so he painted her breast red. Then he threw her up in a tree. There she became a robin.

And that is how the robin got a red breast.

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OLD MAN COYOTE AND THE WILD GEESE

A Crow Indian Folk Story

Recorded by

Joy Yellowtail Toineeta

Once, a long time ago, some Crow Indian warriors got together. They started out on a war party. No one came back. The people left in the Crow Indian camp waited and waited. But the warriors did not return.

Other men of the camp went out to look for the warriors. Nothing could be found. The men returned to camp and the people began crying for the lost warriors.

Summer went by and one day in autumn, the wild geese flew high overhead and toward the south. The people in the camp saw the V-formation of the flying geese. The last goose was very big. He was having a hard time flying. The people looked closely.

A person on the ground shouted, "Look! Someone is on the back of that bird."

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Sure enough, there was a rider on the back of the big goose. Four times the geese circled the camp. Then they flew on to the south.

When spring came, the wild geese flew north again. The Indian people looked. Again there was the rider on the back of a goose. Only this time, he rode on a goose that was closer to the front of the V-formation.

That fall, he was even closer to the front. Then one fall, when the wild geese flew south, the Indians watched. This time the rider was on the lead goose. The geese flew around and around the camp of the Crow Indians. The people heard singing. It was the rider. He was singing. He was singing his war song and telling his story.

He said, "I have been adopted by the geese. This is the last time you will see me. I will stay in the south."

Immediately the people began to wail. But the rider said, "Don't wail. I am happy with the geese. I am happy in the south. I have a good life."

Then he sang his war songs again and the geese flew onward.

Now Eesacha-way-tay, Old Man Coyote, was in the camp. He was always playing tricks on people and trying to show off. He saw how the people watched and listened to the man on the goose.

He thought, "Now it is time to get some attention for myself. I will put on a good show. They will watch me. They will think what a great man I am. They will listen to me."

Out he went. When the geese flew south, he went along. When the geese flew north, there he was, riding on a big goose, closer to the head of the V-formation. Closer and closer, just as the warrior had done.

But Eesacha-wa-tay was not made of the same stuff. On the day he was riding on the lead goose, the geese circled the camp, just as before. But just as the geese flew over the camp, Eesacha-wa-tay fell off. Down, down he fell and landed in the very middle of the camp. All the Crow Indians

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gathered around him. They laughed and laughed. He was the laughing stock of the camp.

Eesacha-wa-tay was so embarrassed that he changed himself into Sheila-bay, his companion the little Fox. Poor Eescha-wa-tay had made a fool of himself. He sneaked away. The people laughed and laughed.

HOW THE ANIMALS AND BIRDS GOT THEIR NAMES

A Nez Perce Folk Story

Recorded by Nez Perce Headstart Teachers

One time, all the animals and birds who lived in the forest did not have names, except one. He was the wise old Coyote. None of the other animals or birds knew who they were or who the others were. They were very lonely and sad because they did not have friends.

The Great Indian Maker, who ruled over the world, called on the wise Coyote. He asked the Coyote to give all the animals and birds a name. The Great Maker was sad to say he had forgotten to do so.

The Coyote said he would be happy and honored to do this. And he set out on his task.

First on his travels, he met a furry animal who was black all over and had a white stripe down his back. Coyote called him Skunk.

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Next, wise Coyote met a very graceful animal. This animal had long legs, a slim body, and a short little knob of a tail. Coyote called him Deer.

As Coyote was going along, something shook the leaves of a tree. Down something flew to the ground and said, "I hear you are giving all of us who live in the forest a name. What shall I be called?"

The Coyote looked at him and said, "Well, you are blue. You have wings and can fly. I'll name you Bluebird." And the blue bird was very happy and flew away.

The Coyote was getting tired, so he stopped to rest in a cave. He heard a growl. Then he saw an animal who looked like a round furry ball with two little eyes staring at him. The animal had sharp claws on his paws.

"Oh," said Coyote, "I'll call you Bear." And the bear was so happy he rolled over and hugged Coyote.

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When Coyote came out from the cave, a little animal with fat cheeks and a black mask across his eyes scooted out from behind a tree. He was in a hurry and said, "My name, my name?"

And as he whizzed by, the Coyote shouted, "You are a Raccoon!"

Of course, the Coyote had many more animals and birds to name. So he continued on his travels for a long time. He gave all the creatures in the forest a name.

And that is how they all got their names.

AFTER DARK

Shoshone Folk Lore
Recorded by Helene Bonatsie
Wind River Indian Reservation

One time there was a little Shoshone boy who lived with his father and mother in a village beside a big river. He was a happy little boy as he played outside with his friends. He was learning to shoot his bow and arrows and race like the wind. He was preparing for his manhood when he would be called upon to be a great warrior.

One evening, as dusk was coming, his father called him to come in from play and join the family in the teepee. But Little Boy was having such a good time, he did not listen to his father's call. Suddenly Little Boy noticed it was dark and he had strayed a long way from his village. He became afraid, as he remembered about Woke-ga-moom-bitch. Woke-ga-moom-bitch was a human owl who was

always flying around the Indian villages at night, waiting for the little children who stayed out too late.

Little Boy heard the harsh sound of beating wings. He started to run for home. But he was too late!

Before him appeared Woke-ga-moom-bitch, tall as the teepee, a human spirit in the form of an owl. But instead of feathers, Woke-ga-moom-bitch was covered with scales and he had two huge red owl eyes.

He lifted Little Boy up and flew away with him through the dark night, far away over land and water. He set the boy down in his nest high in the cliffs. He walked around and around the boy. But he decided to look for another wandering child before the night was too dark.

When Woke-ga-moom-bitch flew away, the little boy jumped up and ran down through the cliffs. He ran into a deep cave. He felt his way along the sides until he found a big rock at the back of the cave. Then he hid, flattening himself against the

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rock wall. Soon he heard the sound of Woke-ga-moom-bitch's wings close by. Woke-ga-moom-bitch was searching the caves for the boy. His long, scaly hands reached into the cave and scraped around trying to find the boy. Little Boy held his breath and never moved.

Finally, Woke-ga-moom-bitch left the cave in which Little Boy was hiding and went to search the rest of the caves in the cliff. The boy waited in the cave until daylight, when Woke-ga-moom-bitch would go back to his nest. Then Little Boy crept out of the cave and tried to find out where he was. As he wandered around, he came upon an old woman with gnarled hands and gray hair.

"Who are you and how did you get here, Little Boy?" asked the old woman.

"Woke-ga-moom-bitch carried me here," he said. "I'm lost. May I stay with you?"

The old woman took him by the hand and took him to her home. She

was very old and unwanted by her tribe and all alone. She was happy to have a little boy with her. But she told him, "Your parents are very worried about you. I must help you get home."

She and the boy started building a boat of bark. "This is to carry you safely across the great water. You must build a fire in it and keep it burning across the water. This will frighten all things away so that nothing will get you."

She made him bark shoes and wrapped his legs in many layers of bark. "You will cross a great desert of nothing but cactus," she told him. Then she made him a buckskin wrap so he would not get cold and so the cactus would not scratch his skin.

"How well can you shoot an arrow?" she asked. She made him a bow and an arrow and Little Boy shot it straight and true.

"Now listen to what I'm about to tell you, Little Boy. Woke-ga-moom-bitch has only one spot where your arrow can go in and kill him. This

is around his mouth or throat. You will cross a big water, cactus, and snake fields and then come to a river. On the other side of the river is your village. But before you cross the river, you must kill Woke-ga-moom-bitch with this arrow."

She handed him a single arrow. Then she said, "When you reach the river, hide in the brush along the bank. Just before nightfall comes, Woke-ga-moom-bitch will come to the river to drink. When he raises his head to swallow, you must shoot. You must not miss or he will know where you are hiding."

When everything was ready, Little Boy took the old woman's hand and begged her to come with him. But the old woman said, "It is the custom of the Indian people to leave their old people behind to die. Here I must live and here I will die."

She gave the boy dried deer meat and berries, wrapped in buckskin. Then she told him goodbye.

The bark boat floated swiftly along. Little Boy did not dare sleep that first night or his fire would go out and Woke-ga-moom-bitch would grab him. He was very tired, but he never shut his eyes.

The next morning, he reached land. He saw nothing but cactus. All day he traveled through the cactus. It tore at his clothes and bark leggings. Many spines got caught in his clothes. But the old woman had made them well.

As night began to come, Little Boy again heard the beating of wings. He quickly climbed a tall cactus. As he climbed, more cactus spines got in his buckskin clothes. Putting himself in the shape of the top of the cactus, he was perfectly still, hardly breathing. Woke-ga-moom-bitch walked around and around the cactus under the boy many times. Woke-ga-moom-bitch looked up at him. "You look just like a little boy," Woke-ga-moom-bitch said.

The boy never moved. Woke-ga-moom-bitch reached up with his scaly

hands and tickled Little Boy. The boy never moved.

"It must be cactus," said Woke-ga-moom-bitch. "It is covered with spines."

Then Woke-ga-moom-bitch left. Little Boy slept in the arm of the cactus all night. Next morning, he climbed down. He ate some of his meat and berries and started again on his lonely journey. He was very thirsty and wished for water. That afternoon, he reached the river. After taking off his bark shoes and his clothing so full of spines, he fell down on his stomach at the edge of the river. He drank as much as he could. Then he waded in and started playing in the water.

Dusk was beginning to fall when he remembered what the old woman had told him. He hid in a bush beside the water and waited, as still as could be. Then the boy heard the dreaded sound again, and there was Woke-ga-moom bitch, right in front of him. The boy was terrified, but he knew

what he must do. When Woke-ga-moom-bitch raised his head to swallow, the boy pulled back his bow with all his might, aimed, and zing-g-g. The arrow buried itself in Woke-ga-moom-bitch's throat. There was a terrible scream and right before the little boy's eyes, Woke-ga-moom-bitch fell and churned up the water.

When Woke-ga-moom-bitch stopped beating his scaly hands and sank out of sight under the water, the boy jumped into the river and swam across. His father was there on the river bank. He still searched for his boy. They were so happy to see each other, they ran all the way back to the teepee.

"He's home! He's home!" cried Father and Mother.

All the next day, Little Boy did not leave the teepee. And he promised he would listen when his father called the next time.

NAPII AND THE BULLBERRIES*

Blackfeet Folk Story
Recorded by
Blackfeet Headstart Teachers

One time as Napii was walking along the river bank, he saw some berries in the water. He was very hungry, so he jumped into the water after the berries.

He looked all around for the berries in the bottom of the river. But he could not find them. Finally he had to come up for air.

Then he jumped in again. Once more he was not successful in finding the berries and had to come up.

This time he said, "I will tie rocks to myself so that I can stay under water until I find the berries."

He almost drowned. But still he did not find the berries.

This time when he was crawling out of the water, he looked on the high bank on the other side of the river. There he saw the berries. Now he knew the berries he saw in

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the water were only the reflection of the ones on the bank.

In anger, Napii picked up a stick and began beating the berry bush, saying, "You tricked me and almost caused me to drown. From now on you will have thorns. And people will have to beat you with a stick to get your berries."

And that is why the bulberry bush has thorns on it, and the berries are difficult to pick by hand.

*Different parts of the country have different names for the bullberries, as buffalo or buck berries.

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